



## HOW DO WE REMOVE DRIVERS WITH SUSPENDED OR REVOKED LICENSES FROM OUR ROADS?

It is becoming more commonplace to hear about drivers who were responsible for a crash but were driving while their license was suspended or revoked. Some state motor vehicle officials estimate that as many as 80 percent of drivers whose licenses are suspended or revoked continue to drive. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) estimates that almost 6 percent of the nation's total fatalities can be attributed directly to suspended or revoked drivers. In California, the toll is even higher. Almost 12 percent of that state's fatal crashes are caused by drivers whose licenses were sanctioned.

So, why are they still driving? Officers call this an *invisible traffic violation*. It's an undetectable offense. Unlike speeding or driving while impaired, a person who gets behind the wheel with a suspended or revoked license does not give an officer any clues of their violation. One NHTSA study found that drivers said their chances of being caught were remote, so they attempted to drive more carefully during the period of suspension. Only if the vehicle is stopped for some other reason will the driver's license be found to be suspended or revoked.

To combat this problem, The National Sheriffs' Association (NSA) reviewed a number of promising programs currently used by law enforcement agencies across the country. *Guidelines for a Suspended or Revoked Operator Enforcement Program* summarizes the best of these programs, and gives a step-by-step approach other law enforcement agencies can use to stop offenders in their areas.

### How it Works

The *Hot Sheet* program targets flagrant abusers of the administrative license sanction process. It starts with a computer printout from the Department of Motor

Vehicles, listing drivers with multiple offenses. Law enforcement agencies then extract the names of the most chronic offenders, sorting them by number of offenses, geographic area, or other enforcement factor. Then they prepare a *hot sheet* of the worst of the worst offenders and give it to patrol units, sorted by geographic boundaries such as residence or place of employment of offenders. The officers on patrol now know who in their areas should not be driving.

The *Hot Sheet* program has been used by the Ohio and Florida State Highway Patrols and was pilot tested for 9 months in Ohio County, West Virginia and Salt Lake County, Utah. It can be modified to meet the needs of local agencies.

### *Salt Lake County, Utah*

Salt Lake County, with a population of 850,000, has an average of 50,000 drivers whose licenses are suspended at any given time. They decided to target the 3,000 drivers whose licenses had been suspended for impaired driving. Working from the hot sheets, deputies increased the number of drivers arrested for operating after suspension or revocation by 14 percent. That's 14 percent more drunk drivers removed from our roads.

### *Ohio County, West Virginia*

The Sheriff's agency in Ohio County experienced their greatest success when they incorporated *Hot Sheets* at traffic check points. They reported that deputies were surprised by the number of people they had seen in their patrol areas on a daily basis, but were unaware that these people were violators until the *Hot Sheet* program.

Agencies reported that developing a *Top Ten* list worked best because this number was a manageable



size. It generated officer interest and could be updated every week or so.

### **What You Need to Make it Work**

The first step, as always, is to conduct a needs assessment of your community's problem areas. The information (data) you need are:

- ✓ *a list of all suspended or revoked drivers, by name and address*
- ✓ *a system of uniform data elements so participating agencies can share data collection and evaluation easily*
- ✓ *an established criterion for identifying the habitual offender*

For example, most state DMVs can sort lists of suspended or revoked operator's licenses by zip-code, city, or county. Depending on the size of the problem in your community, this first list can be large and unmanageable. The next step is to develop a criteria for violators to be targeted, such as those with five, 10, or more offenses in a specific category like driving while impaired. Then cut the list down to a manageable size.

*Guidelines* outlines what computer programming abilities agencies should have in place to develop the *Hot Sheet* program. These include the capability to access the state DMV records, the ability to download names of drivers by location, and the ability to print, copy, and distribute the list to patrol units efficiently. The key to making it work is to keep it simple.

### **Sanctions Against the Vehicle**

While more difficult to implement, *Guidelines* describes how several states have imposed sanctions against the vehicle, rather than the driver. These effectively prevent the suspended or revoked operator from using the vehicle.

*Marking the license plate* -- Washington and Oregon placed a zebra sticker over the annual registration part of the plate, thus identifying the vehicle, and giving cause for an officer to stop to check that the driver had a valid operator's license.

*Seizing the license plate* -- Minnesota has a plate impoundment law for persons observed operating a vehicle after their operator's license has been revoked three times within five years, or four or more times within 15 years for an impaired driving violation. It has proven effective in deterring a repeat DWI offense.

*Immobilizing the vehicle* -- Since 1989, Ohio, New Mexico, Wisconsin, and Michigan have used a steering wheel locking device as a cost effective way to immobilize a vehicle.

### **HOW TO ORDER**

For a copy of *Guidelines for a Suspended or Revoked Operator Enforcement Program* (17 pages), write to the Media and Marketing Division, NHTSA, NTS-21, 400 Seventh Street, S.W., Washington, DC 20590, or send a fax to (202) 493-2062.

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